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## THE LARSEN MEMORIAL ARTS LOTTERY A TWELVE YEAR LOOK

-George W. Thomson  
Professor of Forestry

It was probably a life-time's frustration at having no musical talent at all that prompted the expenditure of a mere \$60.00 for the starting of the gratifyingly successful Forestry "Lottery."

Simply stated, the mechanics of the Lottery is no more complex than the buying of a pair of tickets to a dozen or so moderately high-class performances from the many excellent events that come to the ISU Center each year. Any Forestry student is allowed to sign up for whatever event seems interesting, or prestige-establishing, or so expensive or renowned that "it must be good." A week before the event a winner is drawn, as well as an alternate, and a pair of tickets is made available - with the unnecessary admonition that the tickets must be handed to the alternate, rather than to a roommate, if attendance is impossible.

Periodic inquiry has suggested that the activity has been a success but the unanswered question, of particular interest to me - the instigator - and to the Larsen heirs - the donors since the death of Dr. J. A. Larsen on January 4, 1977 - is: Has this exposure to the performing arts been "educational," broadening, and a stimulus to a new world of enjoyment? A second question should ask if the program is still worth funding.

Perhaps it isn't appropriate to attempt quantification of such an intangible concept as cultural en-

hancement but this is my last year to be involved with this somewhat unusual venture and my affection for progress reports continues unabated. I will risk the tabulation that follows:

It is gratifying to see that the Fund has provided more than 400 tickets (two to each winner after the first trial year) although at a cost well in excess of \$2,500.00.

While the number of students signing up for a chance to attend these selected events has dropped off, the average sign-up for each event is not appreciably different than it was at the start. The apparent slight decline disappears when we look at the decrease in Forestry student enrollment. Actually, it is a pleasant surprise to calculate the ratio of the average sign-up in respect to student body enrollment for there is now a higher *rate* of participation than there was in the early years of the Lottery.

The question that now seems worth asking formally is, "Has the Lottery been a good idea?" To get at this matter I sent a short questionnaire to fifty rather diverse past winners. While the number of responses (19) hardly overwhelmed me, the answers resoundingly confirmed the concept of supporting an appreciation of the performing arts and unanimously encouraged continuance of the program.

The major comment was that it would be nice to have more winners per event as it gets discouraging

**Student Participation in the Larsen Arts Lottery 1976 - 1988**

Year	Number of Participants in Lottery Sign-up	Number of Events	Average Sign-up for Each Event	Total Forestry Enrollment
1976 - 77	749	20	38	236
1977 - 78	808	22	37	258
1978 - 79	699	28	25	234
1979 - 80	544	24	23	208
1980 - 81	656	18	36	183
1981 - 82	533	13	41	174
1982 - 83	557	17	33	161
1983 - 84	516	13	40	147
1984 - 85	617	30	31	107
1985 - 86	428	12	36	87
1986 - 87	386	14	28	93
1987 - 88 (Partial)	359	12	30	82
Total	6,852	223	31	--

to continually sign-up without winning. This is precisely my attitude toward the Iowa Lottery!

The questionnaire searched for general rather than quantitative answers so it is inappropriate to make many specific interpretations of the responses. Perhaps worth noting is the fact that 7 out of 19 respondents were actually stimulated to *continue* attending "cultural" events because of the initial prodding provided by accessibility of free tickets. The other 12 did not need the prodding because they were already interested in theater, concerts and performances of this sort. In the end it has been the written comments of these responding students and alumni that are most interesting and helpful.

The following, largely unedited, comments speak for themselves.

"I was a winner of tickets once but, I believe, a winner many times over from the exposure to something new and different. The combination of education with extracurricular activities, whether it be cultural programs or social activities will produce the well-rounded people that can make the move to the 'real world' with ease."

"I have always felt that this is a worthwhile program - especially for the individual who has an appreciation for this sort of thing, but not the money. Moreover, for the first timer, I think it would prompt future attendance."

"The lottery gave me an opportunity to stretch a limited budget."

"Many students that I talked to have more interest in the happenings at the ISU Center after being exposed to it by the Lottery...and made use of the G.S.B. funded free tickets at certain time to attend other events."

"I have always been interested in the Arts - probably because of my Mother's background. The Lottery did accomplish the task of getting me to the opera (La Traviata) earlier than I anticipated and I am very appreciative of that. And yes, I was very skeptical before the curtain went up on that particular event. However, since then in my 7 years in Ames I probably attended 20 events in Stephens, Fisher and Hilton ranging from piano recitals to musicals to rock concerts. The quality and quantity of

productions presented at the Center make it a sin not to utilize the facilities."

"I strongly encourage everyone to sign up for the Larsen Arts Lottery - even if they don't think they'll like it. Believe me, their attitude will make a complete turn around."

"I hope the Larsen Arts Lottery continues and that students are encouraged to attend ISU concerts because of the tickets although I doubt that attending one concert suddenly makes the student thirst to soak up more music/arts after leaving ISU."

"As a student from a developing country I wanted to attend as many performances as possible. This is good especially for foreign students from 3rd World as they will get a new, fresh, cultural shock. The tickets gave me a new vision about USA and your educational system."

"I was initially skeptical the first time. The second time I was inclined towards the Arts."

"The unusual event I attended was rather deep and intense. Thus I came away willing to experiment because nothing could ever be that deep again."

"The Larsen Arts Lottery was my first exposure to the performing arts at college, and I was hooked. I have fallen asleep at some and applauded until my hands hurt at others. If I add up all the concerts and musicals attended over the past years it is shocking to realize the amount of money spent because of one free ticket back in school."

"I know that whenever a new lottery was posted everyone would quickly check it out to see if they were interested in it or not, and then add their names to the list because it seemed that each of the events was something that he or she wanted to see. I think that people also signed up because they didn't want to think that foresters were uncultured. They

were proud that the Forestry Department has such a rare thing as the Lottery and they wanted it to continue."

"Being an Illinois boy, I have always been a patron of the Arts!"

"My main thoughts here are that I didn't appreciate the opportunity to attend concerts or similar events through the Lottery until after I left ISU for the 'uncultured' wilds of Wyoming, North and South Dakota. If it were not for the Arts Lottery tickets that I won, I wouldn't really have attended much of anything while at ISU. While I wasn't clever enough to realize what I was missing maybe other people, by winning a ticket and attending an event they otherwise would not have, will realize the excellent opportunities offered and then attend other events."

The generosity of the Larsen family has obviously done more than memorialize Iowa State's long-time faculty member, Julius Ansgar (Skipper) Larsen. Broadening the mind and the "civilizing" of forestry students were two of Dr. Larsen's basic tenets. It is well for foresters to remember that Skipper was an educated scholar who whole-heartedly loved all of the manifestations of nature and developed his philosophy of life from that love.

One can scarcely read his early poem, that he called his "first", without seeing why he could so readily have an effect on me and hundreds of other similarly uncultured foresters.

#### The Forester

Ask not ease or wealth or wine  
or humans to adore thee,  
But the friendship of the hills  
And the trail before thee.

Seek not idle merriment,  
Fame or praise or glory,  
But a will to which are bent  
The tasks that lie before thee.

In the eleven short years since J. A. Larsen's death his presence is still felt and his influence continues.

